

# AIRGRAM

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FROM : Amcongen, Paramaribo DATE: October 23, 1965

SUBJECT: Staten Debates Disputed Boundary with British Guiana

REF :

In a rare expression of unanimity, the Surinam Legislative Council adopted a motion on October 7 which called on the government to do all possible to prevent an infringement of any kind to the sovereign rights of the country.

Expectations that British Guiana will soon be granted its independence and an announcement by Premier Burnham on October 4 that the governments of British Guiana, Venezuela and the United Kingdom will discuss at the London conference beginning November 9 ways and means of resolving the dispute regarding the common boundary of British Guiana and Venezuela have revived local interest in Surinam's and British Guiana's common boundary. Staten members were particularly fearful that the act granting independence to British Guiana would define the latter's boundaries to include territory which Surinam claims as its own.

The area in dispute consists of about 15,000 square kilometers in the extreme southern area between the Cocroeni and New Rivers and up to their juncture. By an agreement of 1799 the Governors of Berbice and Surinam defined the boundaries of the two colonies as the Corantijn River. Through much of the 19th century and through part of this century controversy arose from time to time about whether the boundary ran through the main channel of the river or whether the western bank constituted the division between the two colonies. Apparently, British Guiana has now accepted the western bank of the Corantijn as the boundary. Until the discovery of the New River in 1871 the Coeroeni River was generally accepted by both colonies as the principal source of the Corantijn River and therefore the boundary. Since that time neither the authorities

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Clearances:

in Georgetown nor those in Paramaribo and The Hague have been entirely consistent about where the boundary lay, but in general Dutch authorities have maintained that the New River should be considered the boundary as it is the principal source of the Corantijn River. The English authorities apparently have never accepted this contention.

Last year the government appointed a commission to study the legal aspects of Surinam's claim. While the report of the commission has never been made public, apparently the greater part of the evidence to support Surinam's contention was gleaned from the pages of the West Indische Gids, a Dutch publication, whose editions of the 1920's and early 1930's contain much of the historical background of this old controversy. With the conclusion of the commission's investigations, a confidential report was made to the government which then published a decree of May 5, 1965, which changed the name of the New River to the Boven Corantijn River (in English, the Upper Corantijn River).

In an "Question and Answer" period of the session on October 7, Minister President Pengel declared that only a supernatural being could deflect him from his standpoint that the disputed area belongs to Surinam. He promised that the parliamentary opposition would be represented in a negotiating commission which is to be formed. The October 14 edition of the Paramaribo daily "De West" carries an ANP report that the government of the Netherlands Kingdom will, in consultation with the Surinam government, contact the British government concerning a definite settlement of the boundary between Surinam and British Guiana. Presumably, this will be done before discussions get underway in London between the governments of the United Kingdom, Venezuela and British Guiana.

  
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